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Genres and Inequality in the Creative Industries

Ana Alacovska¹ and Dave O'Brien²

ABSTRACT

Genres organise and facilitate cultural, creative and media production and consumption but are rarely central categories in extant research on creative industries. With this editorial article we aim to reassert, reassess and revisit the salience of genres for understanding inequalities in the cultural and creative industries. We argue that genres, as classificatory devices, structure and order a gendered and racialized division of labour and occupational practice. Genres sanction what is and what is not aesthetically and ethically appropriate to do and think within specific textual categories and, hence also, within genre-specific production cultures. Genres draw boundaries, shaping and normalizing the gendered and racialized professional values and norms that underpin unequal patterns of access, distinction and career advancement within creative occupations. Cultural producers, in turn, are compelled to forge professional *genre* identities at the same time as constantly having to negotiate their gender and racial fitness to work and prosper in specific categories of cultural production. The contributions to this edited collection elucidate, through a plethora of methodological and theoretical approaches, the links between genres and persisting inequalities across the book, screen, and music industries.

Keywords: creative industries, creative work, cultural labour, cultural production, discrimination, gender, genre, race, social inequality

Introduction: Genres – the elephant in the cultural production room?

In 2006 the California Supreme Court dismissed a lawsuit brought by Amanda Lyle, a female comedy writers' assistant who claimed that three of the male writers for the sitcom *Friends* had created a hostile and abusive work environment. The court's reasoning for this judgment was that 'physical gesturing, discussion of personal sexual experiences, and other sexual conduct [were] not unreasonable from a creative standpoint' (Brierton and Bowal, 2007: 19). In a subsequent additional opinion (quoted in Miller, 2018), Justice Ming Chin later added the following opinion: 'The writers here did go at times to extremes in the creative process. Some of what they did might be incomprehensible to people unfamiliar with the creative process. But that is what creative people sometimes have to do.'

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Here was a clear case of a hostile work environment, familiar from numerous studies of sexism in film and television production (e.g. Berridge 2020; Cobb 2019; Dent 2020; O'Brien 2019), and yet the California Supreme Court determined that persistent offensive and bawdy comments, sexual banter and lewd gestures did not necessarily create a hostile work environment or warrant claims of sexual harassment in the context of producing a comedy show. According to this judgement, indecency, innuendo, sleazy remarks and unsavoury jokes are 'a creative necessity' in a comedy-producing workplaces (Brierton and Bowal, 2007), with the implication that such impropriety may even be an inextricable part of the creative process, thus constituting legit professional conduct essential for the performance of this job (Heuman, 2016: 196). The defence in the case of *Lyle v. Warner Bros* further reasoned that 'comedy has always pushed the limits of propriety' and that 'brushing up against societal norms is the essence of most comedy' (\$125171, 10–11, cited in Heuman, 2016: 201).

This case highlights the power of genre to reinforce misogynistic work cultures and a gendered division of labour in the television industry. The power of genre operates far beyond single instances of hiring, commissioning, programming and marketing, all of which are areas that have been subject to academic research into the relationship between genre and inequality (e.g. Alacovska, 2015, 2017). The gendering power of genres is revealed in this case as pervasive and even enshrined in a legal judgement that guarantees its persistence and the perpetuation of inequalities in the creative workplace. Since the ruling was passed, *Lyle's* case has become a staple of HR guidelines across the television industry, serving as a cautionary tale for employees as to what they may or may not complain about (Miller, 2018).

The power of genres can be illustrated too in the case of Jimmie Allen, who in November 2018 became the first black artist to reach number one on the Billboard country music airplay charts. Despite country music being the most widely listened to genre on the US radio, country artists are typically perceived as male and white. This is 'a genre that has often been ruthlessly close-minded about who can lay claim to the rural experiences' (Caramanica, 2018) and who can or cannot 'appropriate' 'southern working-class experiences' (Pecknold, 2013: 3). Copious amounts of 'ideological' and 'institutional work' – in the form of encyclopaedia entries, popular press coverage, symbolic representations and marketing efforts, etc. – are 'required to maintain the fiction of this genre's "'natural" whiteness' (Pecknold, 2013: 3). The definition of country music in explicitly racialized terms not only threatens to 'sort out' black artists from the cultural and commercial history of this genre (Pecknold, 2013) but also excludes them from professional existence within the bounds of the genre (Caramanica, 2018). In country music, it seems, specific groups do not have the ideological, cultural and professional right to engage. Jimmie Allen himself has related how

"At first, things weren't going my way. I was something new – no one was going to take a chance on a black artist from Delaware – so I lived in my car for four months, working in a gym where I would wash my clothes and shower. ... "Some people automatically assume I'm a rapper, but why wouldn't I be country? It's the music I've always listened to, and there are a lot of people that look like me who listen to and love country music too." (quoted in Kalia, 2018)

Both the judgment in the case of *Lyle v. Warner Bros* and Jimmy Allen's struggle to make it in country indicate the close relationship between genre and inequalities in the cultural and creative industries, showing how genres draw boundaries and shape the professional and occupational values and norms underpinning the patterns of unequal access to creative occupations with which we are already familiar (Brook et al., 2020;

O'Brien et al., 2016). Notwithstanding the centrality of genre in perpetuating inequalities, however, genre has not been central to the now extensive volume and range of scholarly work on inequality in creative industries and occupations.

Although the importance of genre has been recognised at least as far back as Aristotle's *Poetics*, genre has since come to be dismissed in much of the literature, repeatedly proclaimed as 'aesthetically impotent', 'declining' and even 'catatonic' (Croce, 1995 [1909]; Drott, 2013; Fowler, 1971). Genre and genre theory, with all its implications of constraint on artistic autonomy, limits on originality and possible stifling of creativity through the imposition of rules, conventions and norms, has thus had a troubled history (Frow, 2005) and the notion of genre has all too often been pronounced dead. It was only half-jokingly, for example, that David Duff (2000: 6) attributed the reticence of English-speaking intellectual traditions to engage with the category of genre to the word "genre" itself, which he claimed to be 'virtually unpronounceable in English', thereby reminding users 'of its very alienness' the moment it is uttered.

As we aim to show with this special issue, such obituaries of genre are premature and misguided. In practice, genres seem more alive and kicking today than ever before. Indeed, popular culture genres in music, television, film and literature have only gained reinvigorated prominence on digital platforms and streaming services in our era of algorithm-driven preferences in cultural tastes (Andersen, 2015; Beer, 2013; Spinuzzi, 2012). In spite of modernist 'end-of-genre' celebrations, genre persists as an important category that plays a particularly decisive role both in the organisation of cultural production (Alacovska, 2017; Bielby and Bielby, 1994; Born, 2010; Bruun, 2010) and in the management of audiences' preferences and tastes (Lena, 2012; Peterson, 1997). With this special issue our aim is thus to reassert, reassess, and revisit the salience of genres for better understanding inequalities in the cultural and creative industries.

Reasserting genre: from reception to cultural production and creative industries

The enduring influence of structuralism on the study of culture brought about the widely accepted idea that media and popular culture texts 'belong' to certain genres by virtue of their formal, structural and technical codes and procedures (Derrida, 1992; Todorov, 1990). Under this influence, scholars investigated the visual, aural and sonic stylistics and aesthetics of texts with the aim of retrospectively fitting these 'finished and finalized' cultural objects into already existing and well-delineated categories. This classification was made on the basis of similarities and differences in textual, structural properties such as characterization, plots, rhythm and atmosphere (Altman, 1984; Frith, 1998). With the gradual dissolution of such a 'textual bias', media and cultural studies began building upon Jauss's (1982) ideas of genres as mediators of textual understanding that link readers' and producers' 'horizons of expectations'.

The concept and category of genres proved especially useful when scholars started questioning the supposedly direct, unmediated and hegemonic effects of texts, and especially the effects of television programmes on TV audiences, with the former previously commonly depicted as products of propagandist political economies of cultural production and profit-seeking ownership structures and the latter as being prone to passive docility and thus susceptible to manipulation (see Livingstone, 2013; Morley, 2003). This usefulness stems from the fact that the category of genre allows for a critique and rejection of the idea that there is a direct and hegemonic injection of meaning from producers into audiences, serving rather to highlight how cultural understanding invariably and actively happens through genres as 'systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text and subject' (Neale, 1981:6).

It is now commonplace to recognize that genres guide, order and structure relationships among producers, texts and audiences by functioning as 'promotional labels' and 'marketing devices' (Frith, 1998; Negus, 1999; Squires, 2007). Genres are also widely understood as 'institutional mechanisms' that align the processes of cultural production with consumers' tastes and preferences, for example by 'formatting' and building up a 'genre-based repertoire' (Lopes, 2002; Peterson, 1997 Ryan, 2010).

Although some of the canonical works of cultural studies have recognised the producer-text-audience triad, or the 'circuit of culture' in the words of du Gay et al. (1996), scholars have tended to concentrate on the relationship between texts and audiences as mediated by specific genres (e.g. Hill, 2014 on reality TV shows; Livingstone, 2013 on soap opera; and Radway, 1984 on popular romance literature). In these studies of specific genres we can see the ways in which genre links structural analysis to the empirical study of how situated and contextualized audiences engage, with audience engagement understood as being active, resistant and purposeful, embedded within daily practices of meaning-making and identity formation. Genre has thus proved one of the most heuristically potent categories in reception studies.

Reception scholars have long noted that genres serve as a means for audiences to 'demarcate appropriate thought, feeling and behavior and provide frames, codes and signs for constructing a shared social reality' (Ryan and Kellner, 1988: 77). On this basis, scholars have reached a near consensus that there is a significant correspondence, albeit never a complete overlap, between social groups (audiences and their social realities) and textual clusters (genres and their frames of reference). Scholars working in music, film and television studies have shown how genres are classificatory devices that 'sort out' audiences through specific textual categories, contending thereby that specific categories of cultural products are homologous with pre-existing demographic categories of gender, class, race and ethnicity, etc. In this sense especially we can see the obvious relationship of genre to inequalities within the consumption elements of the circuit of culture, since genres underpin the cultural affinities of certain groups of audiences who in turn converge and participate in 'shared social realities' linked to 'genre-specific communities' (Lena, 2012; Lena and Peterson, 2008). Against the background of these audience-genre homologues (Bourdieu, 1984), reception scholars have further argued that the linkage between genres (kinds of text) and people (kinds of audiences) serves to structure social inequalities by normalising, labelling, categorizing and legitimizing genre-based social identities and belonging. Audiences are thus categorized by genres, and genres in turn can be gendered and/or racialized. Genres of popular music such as country or blues, for example, have been found to evoke connotations of a particular demographic (hillbillies and African Americans, respectively) (Brackett, 2016), while hip-hop is strongly associated with the 'street' lives of ethnic minorities (Bennett, 1999) as soap operas are with the domestic lives of housewives and mothers (Levine, 2017).

In contrast with its widespread application in reception studies, genre is a much less common analytical category in cultural production and cultural labour studies. (For exceptions to this, see Born, 2010; Bruun, 2010; Street, 2000; Valaskivi, 2000). For while the relationship between audiences and genres may seem self-evident and even self-explanatory, the relationship between genres and producers is anything but clear. Indeed this relationship has long been obscured, not least due to the influence of the revered if discursively constructed (male) figure of the author (Woodmansee, 1994). Ever since Romanticism and its ideals of a unique and idiosyncratic artistic genius, cultural producers cherished a long-standing aversion to genres. As textual novelty and originality became proxies for artistic quality (adjacent on an artist's imputed uniqueness and inimitability), genres, and its long-term corollaries of convention and repetition, became actively disdained,

resisted and condemned by cultural producers (Duff, 2000; Frow, 2005). Any 'truly' artistic or high-quality cultural production (e.g. 'quality TV'), it is held, always negates, subverts and disrupts extant genre-specific conventions and formulas (Bourdieu, 1996).

A baseline understanding of genres is that they are constantly in flux – perpetually renewed, revamped and reinvigorated. This understanding has influenced some empirical studies of cultural production that have followed the idea of 'genre-in-process' to chart the evolving and changing production aesthetics brought about by specific genres (Born, 2010: 193). Through this prism, producers are seen as resisting the reduction of their work to a mere function of genre, struggling with genres and working to subvert their conventions in pursuit of novelty. In doing so they push the field of cultural production in new directions by imposing a novel *doxa*, a set of innovative practices or aesthetic principles (Bourdieu, 1996). Understood as diachronic, historical and always-in-flux categories, genres are at best categories employed (and studied) by critics as a benchmark for evaluating artistic value and cultural legitimacy. The value and legitimacy of cultural productions are hereby measured in terms of the extent that they either deviate from the aesthetic, ethical and material production norms and conventions imposed by genres, i.e. are innovative and novel, or comply with these norms and conventions, i.e. are repetitive and thus redundant (Janssen et al., 2008). As such, genres are categories that help communicate value and legitimacy to audiences and markets (Alacovska, 2015c; Squires, 2007).

Scholarly acceptance of genres as production categories is a potentially hazardous enterprise that risks implying a 'philistine' and even 'sacrilegious' denial of the 'sacred' aesthetic, artistic and novelty status of cultural production (Osborne, 2003), notwithstanding our knowledge that much cultural production inevitably takes place in 'genre-specific production worlds' rather than generalized 'art worlds' (Alacovska, 2017; Bruun, 2010; Tunstall, 2003). Studies of cultural production and cultural labour have shown that genre-specific value systems, behavioural norms, ethical dispositions and aesthetic requirements are conventionalized and institutionalized in occupational practices and industrial procedures via processes of socialization, education and lore (Saha, 2018). As 'formatting devices' (Ryan, 1998), genres coordinate, structure and facilitate work routines in complex organisational units (Bruun, 2010; Tunstall, 2003). Genres furnish conventions and established modes of thinking and practices in cultural production. Cultural producers use genres to legitimize, rationalize and justify outcomes of habitual decision-making and business transactions such as selling and buying content globally, commissioning, investment and scheduling decisions (Bielby and Bielby, 1994; Bielby and Harrington, 2004; Alacovska, 2013).

Less attention has been paid in studies of cultural production and labour, however, to the classificatory power of genres that legitimizes the linkage among certain 'classes' or 'kinds' of people and the production of specific 'classes' or 'kinds' of text. Accordingly, we possess only a limited understanding of how genres imbue experiences of gendered and/or racialized hiring, work experiences and career advancement in the field of cultural production. This is in stark contrast to the rich understanding already developed of genre-specific audience experiences of exclusion and of discriminatory aesthetic value hierarchies.

Nevertheless, some scholars of cultural production and creative labour have already explored the ways in which genres serve, invisibly but potently, to *gender* producers' experiences in cultural work, along with the gendered valorisation and legitimation of forms of labour in cultural production (Alacovska, 2015b; O'Brien, 2019). Genres such as travel writing and crime fiction, for example, which are traditionally structured around male poetics, aesthetics and value systems, have been found to discriminate against, exclude and delegitimize

female producers as competent or successful workers in these genres (Alacovska, 2017). Moreover, practitioners in female-dominated genres such as the genre of romance, which features sexual content, are sexually stigmatized, with writers having to constantly negotiate 'slut-shaming' rhetoric and resist sexualized pigeonholing across the publishing industry and the book market (Lois and Gregson, 2015). In her recent study on *Women, Inequality and Media Work*, meanwhile, Anne O'Brien (2019: 66) has demonstrated how the women television producers she studied had continually encountered and been compelled to come to grips with 'gendered role allocation' and fight for their place in 'testosterone-driven genres' such as current affairs.

Genres also structure a gendered social organisation of labour. Nochlin (1988), for example, has shown how at least one part of the answer to the question of 'Why have there been no great women artists?' can be found in the historically specific definition of the aesthetics of 'great paintings' in the 19th century, wherein the nude was defined as 'the highest category of art'. Due to considerations of female propriety and sexuality, women artists were denied access to nude painting lessons at arts academies and studio painting sessions, thus depriving them of the opportunity to create works according with this definition of 'great art' and restricting them to less prestigious genres in 'the "minor" fields' of portraiture, landscape and still-life painting (Nochlin, 1988: 160).

Analogous patterns of the discriminatory effects of genre can be seen in regard to race and ethnicity. As Anamik Saha (2013, 2018) has shown, cultural decision-makers and managers use genres as a way of constraining the opportunities offered to people of colour within cultural production, reducing their work to 'gaps in the market' or what Saha terms 'curry tales'. White cultural producers, in contrast, are given creative freedom. Similar inequalities have been found to prevail in processes of typecasting according to race in theatre work (Friedman and O'Brien, 2017) and in simultaneously enabling and constraining impacts of diversity agendas on 'black' cinema production (Nwonka and Malik, 2018).

The potent but often invisible power of genres to structure, order and accentuate social inequalities in cultural production is a phenomenon long overdue for further investigation. Accordingly, the contributions to this special issue each demonstrate in various ways how the working practices seen as core to creative industries are made possible or restricted through genre categorization, naturalization and segmentation.

In order to critically appraise the gendering, racializing and class-ifying power of genres, we must first move away from the usual understanding of genres as being always-in-flux, i.e. from the 'genre-in-process' approach that sees genres as diachronic, genealogical and historical (Born, 2010). Instead we must move towards an analytical understanding of genres as categories that are, at least temporarily and for the purposes of analytical enquiry, *stabilized*. In this view, genres exhibit synchronous and relatively durable structural, aesthetic and ethical properties (Alexander and Smith, 2006; Todorov, 1990). An analytical understanding of genres thus entails approaching genres as relatively stable and durable classificatory systems, in this way rendering manifest their invisible but powerful exclusionary and discriminatory force (Bowker and Star, 2000).

The invisible forces of categories: Genre, inequality, and cultural production

Despite political initiatives and efforts on the part of creative industries to ensure diversity, inclusion and participation, the creative industries continue to be marked by significant inequalities (Gill, 2014; O'Brien et al., 2016). These social inequalities in cultural work are, in the words of Gill and of Jones and Pringle, 'unspeakable' and 'unmanageable', ranging from gender (Conor et al., 2015; Jones and Pringle, 2015; Scharff, 2017) and racial

inequalities (Saha, 2018) to class disparities (O'Brien et al., 2016) and discrimination against people with disabilities (Randle et al., 2015). Whilst research on these inequalities has a long and rich history, it is marred by the conspicuous absence of *genre* as a framework for understanding and explaining inequalities in hiring, commissioning and valorisation in cultural labour.

Discounting the importance of genres in studies of social inequalities in creative work results in an underestimation of the gendering, racialized and class-ifying impacts of aesthetic and ethical norms that are historically normalized and conventionalized in specific genres and their production cultures in favour of emphasising systemic and institutional factors such as informal methods of recruitment, networked cultures and social belonging (Brook et al., 2018; Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012). While such systemic factors are indeed important, they are by no means the only possible explanations for the protracted and obdurate social inequalities that seem immune to already well-established cultural diversity initiatives and policies aimed at minimizing social disparities and exclusion in the creative industries (Newsinger and Eikhof, 2020).

The impacts of genres are quite clear once a light is shone upon them. For example, a study by Smith, Pieper and Choueiti (2017) of all film directors who helmed the hundred top-grossing films in Hollywood from 2007 to 2016 finds that an overwhelming majority of women directors works in the genres of comedy and animated movies but rarely in 'more lucrative genres' such as action films or thrillers. The study further finds that films by black directors fall primarily in the genres of drama and comedy, which are also the genres that predominantly feature black on-screen characters. A recent report by Nesta, drawing on a large dataset of the British Film Industry, documented that female film-makers, both in on-screen and behind-the-screen roles, are severely underrepresented in the genres of action, thriller and war films (Nesta, 2017). The latest *Writers' Union* study of screenwriters in the UK similarly found that 'women in TV, for example, are being pigeon-holed by genre and are unable to move from continuing drama or children's programming to prime-time drama, comedy or light-entertainment' (Kreager et al., 2016: 4). An investigation by Directors UK, the largest professional association of directors for UK television, confirmed that Black Asian and Minority Ethnic directors 'were critically under-represented and under-employed' in the UK television industry between 2013 and 2016 (Directors UK, 2018). This report further confirmed a pattern of already marginalised people within the directing workforce being primarily assigned to genres that are typically considered of lower prestige and economic importance and, hence, being denied opportunities in more lucrative and high-brow genres: 'Some of the most popular drama, comedy and entertainment shows had never been directed by a director who was of black, Asian or minority ethnic background'. Confirming Bourdieu's (1984) thesis on the relationship between social location and cultural consumption as an expression of social inequality, we thus see an analogous pattern in the relationship between cultural production and genre.

How are we to explain this close correspondence between genres and specific kinds of cultural producers? How are we to make sense of social inequalities that seem to cluster by genres? We argue that it is only by recognising the importance of what Bowker and Star (2000: 5) call 'the invisible forces of categories' and 'classification systems' that we can better understand the genre-based social inequalities in creative work.

Genres classify and categorize (Beer, 2013). They assign cultural producers to specific roles and sections of the production system, including both private and state-subsidised production. Genres 'sort out' people according to racial, gendered and class traits. The classificatory power of genres as structuring forces in various fields has been assiduously examined in sociological studies of cultural consumption. As noted earlier, these studies have

conclusively demonstrated that genres, by virtue of being central to cultural taste and preferences, are vital mechanisms in the ascription of distinction.

Cultural taste is genre-dependent even when it is omnivorous, since cultural taste preferences are homologous with genre preferences that in themselves are invariably hierarchical. Thus it is that so-called 'highbrow' genres are associated with higher social classes with copious amounts of cultural capital while 'lowbrow' genres are associated with classes with limited cultural resources (Bourdieu, 1984; Lamont, 2012). Genres 'bestow distinction' as they segregate and stratify taste as low or high, debased or elevated, and by the same token signal belonging to specific social strata (Bourdieu, 1996; DiMaggio, 1987; Lizardo, 2018; Peterson and Kern, 1996). In this way those with appropriate genre preferences and 'cultural competence' (acquired through educational and family socialization in certain genres) can claim belonging to elite social strata and signal their social, class and gender affiliations via their cultural consumption patterns (Bourdieu, 1984; Lamont, 2012). Even where these hierarchies have been challenged, for example by new forms of distinction (e.g. Hanquinet 2017), genres still serve to structure the boundaries crossed by so-called omnivorous orientation.

Genres carry within themselves the class, gender and racial ideologies that underpin social reproduction (see Nochlin, 1988). Even early canonical works of class and cultural studies highlight the role of cultural consumption, structured by genre, in reproducing social positions. In his seminal work *How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*, for example, Paul Willis (1978) argued that the ways in which the working class 'lads' he studied identified with and participated in certain types of 'leisure' and 'cultural forms' such as commercial dance music played an important role in locking these boys into 'working class jobs' by furnishing them with particular modes of performing masculinity. Affiliation with specific genres thus plays a major role, as Willis maintained, in the ways working class boys 'learn to labour properly'.

More recently, Lauren Rivera's (2015) study of hiring practices in American elite workplaces found that class-based recruitment procedures were based on tacitly shared cultural preferences among hiring managers and graduates. This was manifested, among other things, in shared preferences for certain types of music; hence Rivera's observation that 'one cannot imagine that giving a client presentation in country music [...] would be appropriate in a top-tier consulting firm' (Rivera, 2015: 340). Similarly, Koppmann (2016) has found that advertising managers hire new creative workers who reflect their own cultural consumption. Through the stratification and hierarchisation of taste in cultural consumption, genres can facilitate or hinder access to specific gendered, racialized and classed fields of cultural production, as has been found for example in the case of crime fiction publishing (Alacovska, 2017) and romance publishing (Lois and Gregson, 2015). In these ways genres thus serve to perpetuate discrimination, social stigma and social inequalities (Oakley and O'Brien, 2016).

As classificatory devices, genres embody ethical and aesthetic choices, valuation schemes and distinction patterns that in turn affect people's perceived *fitness* for working in genre-specific cultural productions and professions. Importantly, educational and industrial institutions actively and effectively maintain, validate and reproduce genres as classificatory systems through which decision-makers recognize, often unconsciously and routinely, this supposed *fitness*. Genres are thus exclusionary in that they certify the seeming objectivity and neutrality of exclusion by virtue of being deeply ingrained and even naturalized in occupational practices in the form of collectively accessible value systems and behavioural matrices.

As Bowker and Star (2000: 26) have argued, classification systems can either ‘give advantage’ or ‘give suffering’, meaning that while some benefit from the exclusionary power of genres, others suffer from this power. Those who do not ‘fit’ are compelled to painfully negotiate their gendered and/or racialized membership with genres and to carefully manage this categorical mismatch. Cultural producers constantly undertake such ‘categorical work’ in order to ‘negotiate their membership in a community of practice’ (Bowker and Star, 2000: 311). Once cultural producers have been placed into certain categories (or genres), they must further ‘learn from those categories how to behave’ (Bowker and Star, 2000: 311) and thus adapt their professional qualities, aspirations and achievements in line with exclusionary and discriminating genre categorizations (Espeland, 2002). Indeed the power of genres to maintain and perpetuate exclusion and discrimination is so normalized in creative practice that this power only becomes transparent when conventions are disrupted and expectations subverted – as demonstrated in our two opening cases.

Cultural producers are thus compelled to develop genre identities. Their artistic identities and competencies are reduced to genres that are congruent with their class, gender and racial characteristics (Oggins, 2014). In turn, decision-makers reproduce the classificatory power of genres. They do this, for example, by evaluating genre-fitness and measuring performance via putatively objective genre categories in which valuation schemes are by default, albeit often invisibly and imperceptibly, gendered, classed and racialized. Genres reinforce gender, class and racial exclusion by naturalizing and conventionalizing gendered, classed and racialized ethical and aesthetic norms and values in cultural production.

Analysing genre, analysing inequality: an outline of this Special Issue

The contributions to this special issue explore the ways in which genres shape relationships of production and genre-specific ‘suffering’ experiences of cultural labour by virtue of their classificatory power. The focus here is not on defining what genres are or how they enable or constrain novelty or invention but on analysing the role of genres as active classificatory devices, i.e. as metrics for determining *fitness*. Genres, we argue, exercise a profound though often not expressly articulated influence on cultural producers. Genre shapes how workers behave, act and go about securing economic sustainability and professional self-definition in cultural and creative occupations. We see this powerfully substantiated, for example, in Johnson and Peirse’s study of women scriptwriters.

As genres constrain, they also enable – an ambivalence we have noted earlier in our discussion of the literature on cultural production and cultural consumption. The common starting point for all the papers in this special issue is an understanding of genres as constituting devices that offer resources which enable ‘forms of seeing and interpreting particular aspects of the world’ and ‘ways of conceptualizing reality’ (Bakhtin, 1986: 5). Proceeding from this starting point, all of the authors share an interest in how genre-specific norms, conventions and expectations are hard-wired into professional practice, supporting codes of conduct, behaviours and ways of thinking that constitute the basis of workforce inequalities.

A sustained focus on genres as ordering and structuring devices in cultural work is a step towards attaining a *non-reductionist* understanding of social inequalities in professional cultural production worlds – an understanding that builds on the premise that power-asymmetric social relations and structural limitations are never a necessary or sufficient explanation of social inequality and precarity, especially in the case of cultural work. Persistent social inequalities and precarity in cultural work are instead always mediated via the autonomously patterned, aesthetically coded and ideologically laden genres with which workers occupationally

identify and upon which their livelihood depends (Alacovska, 2017, 2015b). A sustained focus on genres thus allows for considerations of deeply ingrained occupational ethics and aesthetics to be discussed reflexively in relation to work inequalities in cultural production. Moreover, such a non-reductionist understanding of creative labour does 'justice to culture', since 'doing justice to culture' entails 'respect for the rules and law of a genre' (Banks, 2017: 1, citing Ross, 1998: 4).

The role of genres in denying access to or hindering career progression in cultural production is the subject of the opening papers presented here. Genres furnish taken-for-granted and normalized modes of behaviour, conduct and thinking, all of which predispose cultural producers to act in certain pre-sketched ways that are deemed appropriate, often implicitly, by the entire slew of 'genre participants' (Lena and Peterson, 2008). Given that many cultural producers operate in labour markets characterized by fierce competition, insecurity, deregulation and poor unionization (Banks, 2017), developing a genre-specific identity either as a 'genre specialist' or 'genre generalist' has long been considered an effective market-rationalization strategy (Zukerman, 2005).

Every attempt on the part of cultural producers to establish a requisite 'genre identity' inevitably entails their getting to grips with the 'huge power of genres' enshrined in 'genre-consciousness' (Colie, 1973). Such genre-consciousness reifies identity-making guidelines through processes of typecasting that 'trap' cultural producers within neatly delineated genre-identities and hence into limiting and limited market niches (Friedman and O'Brien, 2017). All genres thus include or exclude specific 'classes of cultural producers' from their purview. As observed by Gilbert and Gubar (1979: 78) in their agenda-setting feminist study, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, for example, gender discrimination in literary fields never occurs merely as a function of 'general vocational abilities' but 'as a function of predominantly male genres in which writers operate'.

It is in this context that **Beth Johnson and Alison Peirse** analyse the operation of gender inequality in screenwriting. Their paper blends an analysis of a 2018 industry report on gender inequalities with fieldwork interviews conducted with women screenwriters to demonstrate the operation of sexism through genres in television. Gender inequality is undoubtedly evident in the UK screenwriting industry, with less than a third of television episodes written by women and less than a fifth of programmes with women-led writing staff. Whilst there is an extensive literature on gendered inequality in TV, some forms of which we have detailed in this introduction, Johnson and Peirse focus on the role of genre in their analysis of these patterns of inequality.

Women's screenwriting careers, as has been documented by Conor (2014), are bounded by genre, with the highest levels of representation found in children's television programming and serial dramas such as soap operas, both of which are relatively low status genres in the overall aesthetic and financial hierarchies of television. Moreover, gendered inequalities are not only reflected in the sorts of genres in which women are able to carve out careers; these genres also foreclose career success in the more prestigious, prominent and even more male-dominated genres such as prime-time drama.

As much as genres constrain careers, they can also enable careers. Johnson and Peirse find that the genres in which women screenwriters are well represented (and there is no genre where women dominate: even in children's television, women only constitute a third of the writing credits) provide positive and supportive working environments that help enable talented women screenwriters to flourish. This is in contrast to the

hostility of other genres' production cultures, which are alienating and exclusive as part of the masculine domination of the upper reaches of the hierarchy in television.

By highlighting the ambivalent constitutive role of genre, Johnson and Peirse remind us how genre intersects with other gendered inequalities, such as all-male hiring networks. They also remind us of the importance of understanding inequality as an intersectional phenomenon, as is manifest for example in the way that gender inequalities in screenwriting are also intertwined with race and class inequalities.

Scharff and Bull's paper highlights the structuring role of genre hierarchies in workforce inequalities. In this instance they focus on classical music, a genre at the 'top' of the cultural hierarchy. The consequences of genre's role in reproducing gendered hierarchies in the production of classical music, as in the case of screenwriting, are striking. The values associated with classical music, including its universality, autonomy and complexity, seem to distance this genre from the 'baggage' associated with other genre conventions, as a consequence of which analysis of classical music as a genre in itself has been comparatively rare. Indeed, Scharff and Bull's respondents struggled to explain the status of classical music as a genre. However, such denial of genre serves in fact to mask the genre conventions in classical music and the role of these conventions in reproducing workforce inequalities. The norms of conduct, behaviour and thought associated with a genre's conventions, serve to exclude individuals from specific performing opportunities, communities and social groups.

Scharff and Bull's participants were nonetheless reflective about the impact of genre conventions on inequalities. They were aware, to some extent, of how the hierarchy of music sub-genres, with classical at its peak, serves to sort individuals within the labour market. This sorting takes place most notably through and within institutions. Particularly higher education institutions contributed to enforcing this hierarchy of subgenres while also inhibiting music students from playing across genres – despite the need to do so as part of a freelance career. Specific roles in the field of classical music mirror the hierarchy of sub-genres in music. As 'serious music', by contrast with other genres described as 'easy' or 'fun', the classical genre still retains its associations with whiteness and masculinity.

Genres as labour market sorting mechanisms are not exclusive to classical music. However, the processes of sorting out unfold differently in other genres, even where the demographics of the participants may be similar. As McAndrew and Widdop's paper demonstrates in the case of jazz music, the focus on seriousness and the valorisation of particular expressions of creativity and individual genius serve similar roles in other music genres that are self-consciously resistant to much of the formal and seemingly conservative practices of classical music. Even when musical practices that are afforded the greatest prestige are very different, the genre's properties lead to the same consequence of excluding women from key professional roles.

McAndrew and Widdop's paper places inequalities within the gradual repositioning of jazz's status as a genre within the broader hierarchical musical field. The 'democratic ethos' of jazz and its relative outsider status, bound up of course with racial inequalities in the United States and elsewhere, masks the entrenched gender inequalities that characterise this genre. McAndrew and Widdop probe and substantiate these inequalities in two ways. They do this firstly by showing how women are underrepresented as *consumers* of jazz (quite irrespective of what we might expect from demographic factors such as their membership of certain cohorts, having children, or levels of education, etc.), clearly elucidating the importance of understanding the gendering of the jazz genre, coded as it is with masculine-associated traits, for explaining audience inequalities, alongside

the gendered nature of friendship networks associated with the attendance of culture in general. Secondly, they show how gendered networks also help to explain inequalities in *production* in this genre. While recent cohorts of British jazz musicians have included an increasing proportion of women, they are still clearly a minority of musicians in the genre. Their peripheral status, the authors argue, is a result of their gender, with women being seen as 'illegitimate' within this male-dominated genre. Here there are clear echoes of Johnson and Peirse's findings in regard to women screenwriters, but what is perhaps most troubling in McAndrew and Widdop's analysis is their concluding point that much of the explanation for jazz's gendered and thus unequal genre lies as much with audience preferences and perceptions as with producer networks.

McAndrew and Widdop also show the value of an eclectic methodological approach to the study of genres, presenting audience data and producers' social networks as two complementary halves of their analysis. These methods have much to offer to analysis in cultural studies of production/consumption, as Nault, Baumann, Childress and Rawlings demonstrate in their analysis of power and hierarchy *within* musical genres. (Bull and Scharf, like McAndrew and Widdop, also gesture to this point in their discussion of the hierarchy between musical genres and the place of classical and jazz within those structures.) For Nault, Baumann, Childress and Rawlings, understanding internal genre hierarchies is an effective means for discovering new modes of snobbery and distinction.

In their paper in this special issue, Nault et al. build on debates related to *cross-genre* cultural consumption to reaffirm the importance of the relationship between social hierarchies and cultural hierarchies. In the American setting, the cross-genre consumption practices of high-status individuals initially seemed to some to signal a more democratic and less hierarchical culture, hence the foremost challenge to Bourdieu's theory of distinction arose from American research (Peterson and Simkus, 1992). This claim arose on the basis that a significant minority of the population 'in the middle' of the social hierarchy in the US have omnivorous tastes, as defined here by their liking of multiple genres of music. Ultimately, however, this crossing of genre boundaries turned out not to signal a decline in hierarchy but rather a new mode of distinction differentiating elites from the rest of society. Higher levels of education and childhood exposure to culture are still associated with liking more 'consecrated' forms of culture, reminding us of the continued importance of cultural capital to US social elites in this highly unequal society.

New possibilities for distinction emerge within and between genres. In analysing this phenomenon, Nault, Baumann, Childress and Rawlings introduce the concept of the 'snobivore' to denote a person who either expresses a liking for many genres but with a hierarchical view of artists, or one who is attached to genre hierarchies but is eclectic in their liking of different artists within those genres. This concept is a challenge to the sociological approach to studying culture and inequality and raises several questions about the use of genre within these studies. For scholars of cultural studies, it not only shows the usefulness of sociological approaches in helping to understand the role of genre in cultural and social hierarchies but also reinforces many of the points made in the other analyses of music presented in this special issue.

The literary field provides the site for analysis of the final two papers. Here we return to the theme of intersectionality in Roiha's analysis of the contemporary feminist novel. On the one hand, the rise of a fictional autobiographical style positioning authors as 'minor characters' in their own lives offers a new means by which to understand gender inequalities in contemporary society. On the other hand, this critical position is dependent on the intersection of class privileges with gender inequalities to find its voice and its status in the

literary field. Class privilege thus operates and is obscured by the genre conventions of the minor character in autobiographical fiction.

Roiha offers a strong theory of genre, in keeping with the approach suggested in this introduction that proceeds from the understanding that genres shape social reality as much as they offer sets of stylistic conventions. As a result, the liberal feminist focus on securing recognition and voice for oneself as a 'minor character' in one's own autobiography shifts the focus away from structural critiques of material economic inequalities insofar as these relocate the responsibility for gender inequality from the social to the individual level. Close engagement with texts, as one of the core methods of cultural studies, serves to demonstrate the operational force of genres to limit the critical potential of liberal feminism even when the central convention of fictional autobiography is to centre ideas of independence and empowerment.

In the final paper, **Berglund** uses 'Nordic Noir' as a case study for exploring a theory of genre in the literary field that is centrally preoccupied with the operational force of literary typologies. In this view, genre shapes everything from the choices of book covers and the tropes deployed in the contents of such books to market success itself. The global success of the genre, codified into 'Nordic Noir', is due as much to translation and sales in foreign markets as it is to domestic consumption. The very specificity of this genre's conventions is what furnishes its seemingly universal appeal.

At the same time, the construction of the genre of Nordic Noir hides significant differences in literary content. Berglund charts the creation and consecration of Nordic Noir as a genre in order to theorise the nature of literary genre itself. The consecration of the genre within international markets and in translation gives 'traditional' crime fiction added status within the literary field. It is a status produced by authors, publishers, and – most crucially – by readers. The distance between the framing of the genre and the content of the books is found to be a productive rather than an inconsistent characteristic of Nordic Noir. This theorisation thus offers a frame for understanding other genres both within literature and beyond.

The combination of empirical material and theorisation is central to the aims of this special issue. By reaffirming the importance of genre, elucidating its analytical usefulness for explaining inequalities, charting its impact across the page, screen, and (musical) stage, and indicating a range of methods and approaches, this collection of papers makes an important contribution to the study of culture. Ascertaining the precise relationships between creative labour, cultural consumption, representation, and inequality is an ongoing theoretical project (O'Brien et al., 2017; Hesmondhalgh, 2016), and we believe the papers collected in this special issue help to demonstrate that genre is a crucial element of this enterprise.

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